

# Trust your gut: Too much thinking leads to bad choices

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Don't think too much before purchasing that new car or television. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, people who deliberate about decisions make less accurate judgments than people who trust their instincts.

"Whether evaluating abstract objects (Chinese ideograms) or actual consumer items (paintings, apartments, and jellybeans), people who deliberated on their preferences were less consistent than those who made non-deliberative judgments," write authors Loran F. Nordgren (Northwestern University) and Ap Dijksterhuis (Radboud University, The Netherlands).

In five separate studies, the researchers found that better judgments can often be made without deliberation. In the first study, participants rated Chinese ideograms for attractiveness. In a following study, participants were asked to judge paintings that were widely considered high- or low-quality. Subsequent groups of participants rated jellybeans and apartments. In all the studies, some participants were encouraged to deliberate and others to go with their gut.

The more complex the decision, the less useful deliberation became. For example, when participants rated apartments on just three primary characteristics (location, price, and size) deliberation proved useful. But when the decision became more complex (with nine characteristics) the participants who deliberated made worse decisions.

The authors believe this study has consequences for the marketplace. "If deliberative attention naturally gravitates toward highly salient or novel aspects of an object, marketers might use a deliberative mindset to focus consumers' attention toward particular aspects," explain the authors.

"For example, if a car boasts one particularly good feature (for example, safety) but has a number of other negative features (for example, expensive, bad gas mileage, poor handling), a car salesman might encourage a potential car buyer to deliberate over the pros and cons of the car, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of safety. In this way, the disturbed weighting of attributes created by deliberation might be used to highlight the one sellable feature and draw attention away from the unattractive features," write the authors.

Paper: Loran F. Nordgren and Ap Dijksterhuis. "The Devil Is in the Deliberation: Thinking too Much Reduces Preference Consistency." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2009.

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